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REVIEWS AND NOTICES

La Religion de J. J. Rousseau. 3 vols. (I, *La Formation religieuse de Rousseau*; II, *La Profession de foi de Jean-Jacques*; III, *Rousseau et la restauration religieuse*.) By PIERRE MAURICE MASSON. Paris: Hachette, 1916. 10 fr. 50.

M. Masson, professor of French literature at Fribourg (Switzerland), had already made important contributions to the study of Rousseau, notably his critical edition of the *Profession de foi du Vicaire savoyard* (1914). The present volumes were completed and partly in type before the outbreak of the war. The proofs were corrected by M. Masson while serving as second lieutenant in the French infantry. In April, 1916, he was instantly killed in action in the Argonne.

This work deals, not merely with Rousseau, but in no small measure with the whole religious development in France from the early eighteenth century to Chateaubriand. It has the thoroughness and accuracy that one has come to expect from the school of M. Lanson. There is also some suggestion of the defect to which this type of scholarship is exposed: the broad lines of the subject tend at times to be obscured by the accumulation of erudite details. A system of numbers in the footnotes refers to the bibliography at the end of the third volume, which runs to 643 titles. The extent of M. Masson's reading is also suggested by his nineteen-page index of proper names.

Extensive as is M. Masson's reading it needed in some respects to be even more extensive. His subject is, for the most part, the great deistic movement, and this movement is pre-eminently international. Deism marks an important stage in the process that has been going on for centuries, namely, the passage of man in his views about himself and his own destiny from a pure supernaturalism to a pure naturalism. Now deism was either rationalistic or sentimental. The chief rationalistic deist of the French eighteenth century was Voltaire; the chief sentimental deist, Rousseau. The origins of both types of deism are largely English. Some knowledge of men like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson is as helpful in understanding Rousseau as a knowledge of men like Locke and Bolingbroke is for understanding Voltaire. M. Masson's references to the English background are slight and superficial. On the other hand, he is very full and interesting on once-popular but now forgotten French authors of deistic tendency, like Claville and Saint-Aubin, of whom Rousseau made a careful study in his youth. M. Masson has also much to say of the deistic physicists (Pluche,

Nieuwentyt, etc.), who are even more anthropocentric than the earlier supernaturalists, who saw everything in nature arranged by a benevolent deity for man's especial benefit (hence the moral commotion caused by the Lisbon earthquake). This harmonizing of man and God and nature by a recourse to final causes, of which Rousseau himself is rather chary, reaches its extravagant culmination in a book like Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Études de la nature* (1784). Anticipations of the point of view of the Savoyard Vicar are also found by M. Masson in various Genevan writers (Marie Huber, Muralt, etc.).

One is struck by the hostile attitude toward intellect and science that already appears in a number of these writers. Up to a certain point the rationalistic and the sentimental deists worked together; they were both arrayed against supernatural religion, against revelation and miracles. Rousseau himself appears as one of the keenest of rationalists¹ in his attitude toward miracles. Voltaire, as we know from his annotated copy of the *Profession*,² took satisfaction in all this portion of Rousseau's argument. But having thus used reason as a weapon against the supernatural, Rousseau would then have it abdicate before sentiment, and at this abdication of reason Voltaire feels only disgust. Rousseau's great thirst is for immediacy. The inner oracle to which he is ready to sacrifice everything that is not immediate (including reason) he names variously sentiment, conscience, soul, heart. Rousseau's motto *vitam impendere vero* implies that he was willing to lay down his life for the truth, but as a matter of fact he had little concern for the truth unless, indeed, one holds that the individual is justified in identifying the truth with his own emotions. An error that consoled Rousseau seemed to him preferable to a truth that afflicted him.³ Instead of adjusting his temperament to religion, he adjusts religion to his temperament. One may thus set up as religious without having to renounce one's ordinary self. M. Masson traces this development with psychological subtlety. "Il ne s'agit point de se perdre en Dieu, mais plutôt d'absorber Dieu en soi. . . . Dans le paradis de Jean-Jacques, Dieu lui-même s'effacera discrètement pour laisser place à Jean-Jacques."⁴

Rousseau's attitude toward religious truth is in the broadest sense of the word aesthetic. He not only tends, like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, to identify beauty and truth, but conceives beauty as the pursuit of pure illusion. "There is nothing beautiful," he was fond of saying, "save that which is not."⁵ Religion may be not only beautiful and consoling to the individual, but it may also be justified by its utility, its social beneficence. "Il ne s'agit pas," says Rousseau, "de savoir ce qui est mais seulement ce qui est utile."⁶ This is what we should call nowadays the pragmatic test. M. Masson indicates skilfully the relationship between Rousseau and recent

¹ See dialogue in the *Profession de foi* between "l'inspiré" and "le raisonneur."

² See *Annales Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, I, 277-79.

³ I, 235; II, 89, etc.

⁴ II, 120.

⁵ II, 260.

⁶ II, 256.

anti-intellectualist philosophers like James and Bergson. He might also have found in Rousseau an anticipation of Vaihinger and his theory of useful fiction.¹

This testing of religion and philosophy, not by their intrinsic truth, but by their beauty and utility, was destined to have important developments, not merely in the Protestant, but also in the Catholic, world. Rousseau himself seems to have felt the superior aesthetic appeal of Catholicism. He was deeply moved, as we learn from Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, by the singing of "les litanies de la Providence" in the chapel on Mont Valérien.² M. Masson studies in detail the Catholic writers between Rousseau and Chateaubriand who tended to subordinate the truth of their religion to its aesthetic charm and social beneficence. No book was ever more thoroughly prepared for than the *Génie du Christianisme*.

The passages of Rousseau that point most plainly to this type of Catholicism are found in the *Profession de foi*; but another side of Rousseau's religious thinking, that embodied in the closing chapter of the *Contrat Social* (*la Religion civile*), is in the highest degree hostile to Catholicism, inasmuch as even the aesthetic Catholic is unwilling to subordinate himself entirely to the state. This chapter aims at nothing less than "to bring together the two heads of the eagle," as Rousseau expresses it; that is, to abolish the distinction between the spiritual and the temporal order which is at the heart of Christianity. Rousseau's attitude toward historical Christianity has, as M. Masson points out, much in common with that of Machiavelli.³ By its insistence on humility, Christianity has made the citizen effeminate and undermined his patriotic pride. The remedy is to get rid of historical Christianity, and not only to make the state supreme, but also to set up a state religion—a religion that is not to be, properly speaking, religious, but merely an "aid to sociability." An old English poet describes religion as the "mother of form and fear." Rousseau would banish fear from religion entirely, and everything that is form and discipline being, as he holds, not of the essence of religion, he would turn over to the state. The essence of religion he sees in a fluid emotionalism, and this a man may indulge in without having two fatherlands, without dividing his allegiance between the spiritual and the temporal order, as he must do if he remains a Christian in the traditional sense.

One immediately relates Rousseau's hostility to Christianity as a form and discipline quite apart from the state to the anticlericalism that has prevailed in France from the Revolution to the present day; and the connection of Rousseau's religious ideas with those of Robespierre, for example, is close and indubitable. M. Masson makes clear, however, that we must be careful not to exaggerate the rôle of Rousseau in the rise of anticlericalism.

¹ *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* (1911).

² *Vie de Rousseau* (éd. Souriau), pp. 106 ff.

³ II, 196.

Many other influences—that of Raynal, for example—tended in the same direction. M. Masson has brought out to some extent, following Aulard, the conflict in the Revolution itself between the rationalists (whether deistic or atheistical), who derive from Voltaire and the encyclopedists, and the sentimental deists, who derive from Rousseau.

The final impression one gets from M. Masson's volumes is that the main religious development from Rousseau is aesthetic and utilitarian Catholicism à la Chateaubriand. But sentimentalism of the type that appears in Rousseau has affected Catholicism only superficially, whereas it has eaten into the very vitals of Protestantism. To make his study of Rousseau's religious ideas complete, M. Masson would have needed to pay more attention, not only to their background in England, but also to their prolongation in Germany. "Rousseau's deeper influence is accomplished on German soil," says Professor Paul Hensel, of the University of Erlangen; "here he became . . . the founder of a new culture"¹ (*Kultur*). Now *Kultur* when analyzed breaks up into two distinct things: on the one hand scientific efficiency, and on the other what the Germans term "idealism." Rousseau is undoubtedly a main source of this idealism, so that to get at his more significant religious influence one would need to trace the transformations of Rousseauism in the writings of Kant, Jacobi, Herder, Fichte, Schleiermacher, Schelling, etc. In these German writers deism passes over into pantheism; and just as deism is either rationalistic or sentimental, so pantheism has tended to be either scientific or emotional. This transition from deism to pantheism can be followed, not merely in the Germans, but in a contemporary of Rousseau's like Diderot. Rousseau rejected pantheism, especially of the scientific type, but there are plenty of examples in his work of pantheistic revery, though he does not develop this pantheistic revery, as does Schelling in his *Naturphilosophie*, into a system of symbolism. M. Masson does not perhaps say enough about pantheistic revery in Rousseau and its relation to his religion, though in what he does say he shows his usual psychological subtlety. For example, he remarks: "La nature que Jean-Jacques adore n'est qu'un dédoublement de Jean-Jacques." "Il s'est senti à l'aise [dans la nature] parcequ'il s'y est senti seul, parce qu'il a pu s'y dilater jusqu'à l'envahir toute."² In short, communion with nature was a welcome substitute for traditional religion, because communion with nature does not impose any check upon one's ordinary self. A man may mix himself up with the landscape to any extent, and yet continue to suffer from what the philosophers term the egocentric predicament.

It should be plain from what has already been said that M. Masson's volumes are an important contribution to the history of ideas. They are not, however, for a reason that remains to be stated, an important contribution to thought. To make a contribution to thought M. Masson would

¹ *Rousseau* (1907), p. 117.

² II, 229.

have needed to discriminate with the utmost sharpness between religion and mere sentimentalism, and this he has failed to do. His inadequacy here, combined with the psychological subtlety he so often exhibits, is positively disconcerting. For example, M. Masson says of Rousseau's religion: "C'est un christianisme sans redemption et sans repentir, d'où le sentiment du péché a disparu et dont Jean-Jacques est à la fois le prêtre et même le nouveau Christ."¹ And then he proceeds to speak of Rousseau's "christianisme profond!"² M. Masson has not made sufficiently clear to himself or to others that the difference between the supernaturalist and the naturalist (or the man who is tending toward naturalism) does not lie in the fact that the supernaturalist insists on dogma and miracles and revelation, whereas the naturalist rejects these things; the difference between the two is inner and psychological. Rousseau opposes to supernatural religion a plea for immediacy: ("Que d'hommes entre Dieu et moi," etc.³). But the supernaturalist also craves immediacy, only he perceives two elements in human nature that are immediate: on the one hand a stream of impulse and desire, and on the other an element that moves in an opposite direction and is known practically as a power of control over impulse and desire. Rousseau and the sentimentalists would follow the stream of impulse and desire, live temperamentally, in short, and at the same time set up as religious. Everything that opposes "spontaneity," that is, the free expansion of impulse, they would dismiss as factitious and conventional. I am indeed dealing only with the total tendency of Rousseauism. As M. Masson points out,⁴ there survive in Rousseau many traces of the older dualism, the sense of a struggle between opposing elements, both immediate, in the breast of the individual, passages that imply the "civil war in the cave" of which Diderot speaks and which he deems purely artificial.

Language seems to break down in describing this dualism of the spirit. For instance, Pascal and Rousseau both refer to the inner and intuitive side of human nature as "le sentiment," "le cœur," etc.; they mean exactly opposite things. Rousseau, indeed, can only be understood as the extreme recoil from Pascal. For Pascal, religion was not only the "mother of form and fear," but he and the whole side of Christianity for which he stands pushed the form to a point where it became a strait-jacket for the human spirit, the fear to a point where it amounted to a theological reign of terror. M. Masson, misled by the prime emphasis that both Pascal and Rousseau put on "le sentiment" and "le cœur," inclines at times to see in Rousseau, not the extreme recoil from Pascal, but his continuer.⁵ Confusion, it would seem, could go no farther. M. Masson has failed utterly to define the change that took place in the eighteenth century in such words as sentiment, heart, virtue, conscience, etc. Under the influence of Shaftesbury and Rousseau

¹ II, 294.² III, 42.³ *Profession de foi*.⁴ II, 115, 273.⁵ I, 90; II, 57; III, 35, 103, 347, 357.

and the sentimentalists these words cease to stand for a force that puts a check on emotion, and become themselves expansive emotions. Virtue, for example, according to Rousseau, is not merely an impulse, but a passion, and even an intoxication.¹

M. Masson shows the same inability to distinguish between religion and mere religiosity in dealing with a writer like Joubert, who comes at the end of his period. "Toute la dialectique sentimentale de Rousseau," he writes, "a trouvé ses formules définitives dans Joubert."² But Joubert is not, as one might gather from M. Masson, a religious aesthete; on the contrary, he is a profound and subtle moralist, a man of genuine religious insight. Now Joubert says that whereas virtue before Rousseau had been looked on as a bridle, Rousseau turned it into a spur.³ This one remark throws more light on Rousseau's relation to religion and morality than anything that will be found in M. Masson's three volumes.

M. Bergson shows that he suffers from a confusion similar to that of M. Masson when he distinguishes two main types of French philosophy—a rationalistic type that goes back to Descartes and an intuitive type that goes back to Pascal.⁴ M. Bergson would have us believe that he himself and Pascal are in the same tradition. Monstrous sophistries lurk beneath this simple assertion, sophistries which if they go unchallenged are enough to wreck civilization. M. Masson's error is so instructive indeed because it is not purely personal; because it points to some radical confusion, some grave spiritual bewilderment in this age. The men of the two chief Protestant countries are now engaged in blowing one another to pieces with high explosives and at the same time trying to starve one another's women and children *en masse*. Some might argue that a religion that has had such an outcome is bankrupt. One reason for this bankruptcy of Protestantism may lie in its failure from the very dawn of the sentimental movement to the present day to discriminate between genuine religious experience and mere emotionalism.

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¹ An influence on the eighteenth century which antedates the sentimental movement, and which in some of its aspects encourages this expansive view of virtue, is that of Jacob Boehme. This side of Boehme would seem ultimately to go back to neo-platonism. Goethe's expansive definition of the good in *Faust* and his identification of the restrictive principle with evil ("der Geist der stets verneint") plainly derives directly or indirectly from Boehme. See *Cambridge History of English Literature*, IX, chap. xii (especially pp. 352-53).

² III, 303.

³ *Pensées*, etc. (éd. Paul de Raynal, 1866), II, 121; cf. also p. 364; "Rousseau a ôté la sagesse aux âmes, en leur parlant de la vertu."

⁴ "On trouverait, en rétablissant les anneaux intermédiaires de la chaîne, qu'à Pascal se rattachent les doctrines modernes qui font passer en première ligne la connaissance immédiate, l'intuition, la vie intérieure, comme à Descartes . . . se rattachent plus particulièrement les philosophies de la raison pure." Article in *La Science française* (1915), I, 17.